

# Prophetic Dialogue as a Model for Theological Formation in Japan

Raj SUSAI

## Abstract

Theological formation as an academic exercise is a new phenomenon in Japan which has been influenced by foreign theological categories. A new and indigenous way of theologizing in Japan is imperative. Situating Japan in the present Asian context and examining the historical development a new way of theologizing is proposed. This paper argues that reading the signs of the times through prophetic dialogue a more relevant theological formation in Japan can be possible. This fourfold dialogue viz., dialogue with people who have no faith community or faith seekers, dialogue with the poor and marginalized, dialogue with different cultures and dialogue with religions and ideologies, create an atmosphere to formulate a relevant theological curriculum. Further the four components of prophetic dialogue namely; biblical apostolate, mission education and research justice and peace and communication will set the pace for a new way of theologizing in Japan. This new endeavor will produce a new and indigenous theological formation in Japan.

## Introduction

The goal of the present paper is to explore new avenues in theological formation in Japan. The paper will have four parts. Part one will, in short, situate Japan in the contemporary world and among Asian realities. Part two will examine the theological formation or education in Japan while part three will deal with the signs of the times that are related and relevant to the theological formation. Part four is an attempt to explore new avenues in theological formation in Japan. It should be borne in mind that this present exercise is in no way conclusive or authoritative on the proposed topic. The main aim is to probe and question the existing structure and to formulate a tentative program for theological formation in Japan. It should be also mentioned that this paper will neither deal extensively on the theological formation in seminaries (a topic for later research) or with the theological curriculum that are presently applied at various seminaries and institutions at present.

## Japan in contemporary World

Since the end of World War II Japan has grown to be an economic giant and wields enormous political clout, yet at the same time Japan has been going through a rough patch with her neighboring countries and has experienced a number of natural disasters including the recent East Japan earthquake and tsunami. Further, over the years numerous new and new-new religious groups and movements have been clamoring for attention while there seems to be an inherent suspicion among the Japanese towards religions in general.

While Japan has established itself as an economic power in the world stage it cannot ignore the Asian realities that surround her, viz., poverty and marginalization, discrimination, plurality of religions, cultures and socio-political ideologies. Japan being a member of Asia and a world economic power must acknowledge these Asian realities. More particularly, the question must be asked whether a theological formation in Asia and situated in Japan can ignore these realities- although most of these problems are not applicable to Japan at present.

Further in a globalized present, how does the theological formation in Japan approach and answer to the signs of times? We live at a time when uniqueness is being stressed while at the same time we see globalization of basic human values. Can there be a unity in diversity or is it just utopian concept? Japan is uniquely juxtaposed to face and answer the difficulties of a new and relevant theological formation for whole of Asia.

### Theological Formation in Japan: A Historical Foundation

Theological formation in Japan can be divided into two different categories, one is the theological formation as a historical discipline offered in Japan and the other is the content of such a discipline. Firstly let us, in short, view the beginning of theological formation in Japan.

Japan's first theological institution was opened in Funai in 1580 following the decree of the Council of Trent which ordered each diocese to establish a seminary. Though the college was closed in 1587 and the Jesuits expelled, promising students were sent to Europe for higher training. In 1593 a one year course was set up for practical and systematic theology and in 1601 another was set up in Nagasaki.<sup>1</sup> Though for a while such a theological formation and Christian activity continued, "the colorful history of the Krishitan movement came to an end, for all practical intents and purposes, when the seclusion of Japan was put into effect in 1639."<sup>2</sup>

The next period of theological education and formation in Japan was not to begin until 1853 with the arrival of commodore Perry. During the mid 1800s various denominations established seminaries but due to various constrains<sup>3</sup> "many seminaries have been incorporated into

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*, (Ed) Scott W. Sunquist (et al). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Cambridge, U. K. 2001. p. 840.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph M. Kitagawa., *Religion in Japanese History*. Columbia University Press, N. Y. 1996. p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> Among many reasons for the slump in the growth were, "natural disasters, war, riots, financial problems, ecumenism, and government policy, development was complicated and involved numerous relocations, mergers, separations, growth and closure." See, *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*, p. 841.

universities as departments of theology.”<sup>4</sup> Many Catholic theological seminaries were also established<sup>5</sup> though some of them were later incorporated into universities. The Tokyo Catholic seminary has been continuing its theological formation as an independent school even today as it had done before, during and after the World War II.

In the 1870s the Orthodox Church founded Denkyo School and later divided into Orthodox Seminary and the Orthodox Seminary for women. Though other institutions were established but were closed during the World War II and after the war reopened as Tokyo School of Theology in 1954. Protestant seminaries were also opened by various churches<sup>6</sup> but with the founding of the United Church in Japan in 1941, 15 seminaries and departments of theology merged to form three seminaries. After World War II, in 1949 these seminaries merged to become Tokyo Union Theological Seminary.<sup>7</sup>

### Theological Formation in Japan: Content

The second category of theological formation in Japan, as mentioned earlier, is the content of such an endeavor. The first problem here is to clarify the concept of “content of theological formation in Japan, what theology or what kind of theology? Is it *theological studies in Japan* (日本における神学研究) that we are concerned with or is it *Japanese theology* (日本の神学) or *theology in Japan* (日本における神学) or *theology for Japan* (日本のための神学) or *theology of Japan* 日本の神学? Depending on the one’s perception the theological formation also will differ. These we will call as the five ideal types of a theological typology to be found in Japan.<sup>8</sup> To explain this typology further and how the types influence theological formation in Japan, let us consider each of them succinctly yet critically.

Theological formation in Japan should distinguish the differences and the characteristics of these *five different theological types in Japan*.

Firstly *theological studies in Japan* is our first theological type. The term itself is self-explanatory. It means theological studies and researches “that are done in the obscure corner

<sup>4</sup> *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*. P. 841.

<sup>5</sup> Missionary congregations such as, Paris Foreign Missionary Society (MEP), Compagnie des Petres de Saint Suplice, the Cistercians, Franciscans, Dominicans, Salesians and later in the early 1900s the Divine Word Missionaries had established seminaries for theological formation. Some of these are still active as independent centers of theological formation and some others are incorporated into School of Theology at Sophia University or into the Department of Christian Studies at Nanzan University.

<sup>6</sup> Some of the churches that opened seminaries were, Nihon Kirisuto Kyokai, Japan Presbyterian Church, Japan Congregational Church, American Board of commissioners for Foreign Missions, Japan Methodist Church, Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, Church of England, Northern Baptist Church, Southern Baptist Church, Lutheran Church, Reformed Church in America, Holiness Church, Free Methodists, Salvation Army, Assemblies of God, Foreign Christian Missionaries of the Christian Church and Nazarenes. Cf. *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*. P. 841.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*. P. 841. At present there are some 24 theological institutions that offer theological formation or into researches pertaining to theology and religion.

<sup>8</sup> This classification of theological typologies owe greatly to Ohki Hideo and Furuya Yasuo.

of the Japanese intellectual world as the caricature of Western theological studies...<sup>9</sup> which have rather little or no impact on the way of life or living. This type although necessary to understand the historical development of theological thought lacks vigor to captivate ordinary mind and people.

Secondly, *Japanese theology* is a conscious attempt to incorporate Japanese cultural characteristics in forming theology. It is also an attempt to “produce Japanese theology by going through the trouble of ‘Japanising’ western theology.”<sup>10</sup> This type can also be termed as indigenization which lacks originality and creativity. Further this type might, to a certain extent, be insensitive to other Asian peoples and cultures and might even lead to nationalism.

Thirdly *theology in Japan* means “theology which exists or is produced in Japan”<sup>11</sup> but extends beyond the geographical description. In this type the theological currents can be either internal or external and is a description of various contemporary theological activities.

Fourthly *theology for Japan* is similar to our first type which includes both Japanese and non Japanese theological methods and doctrinal formulations in forming theology for Japan. This type may or may not consider existent realities of Japan. Further, it can be a theological model or method that is imported. We can also term it as inculturation, where in the central theme of original doctrine is perpetuated with modular changes either to fit into the current realities or to rename an old theological concept or teaching.

The fifth and the final type is ‘*theology of Japan*’ which, according to Ohki, is “totally and radically deals with Japan as an object of theological inquiry.”<sup>12</sup> Further it is also an attempt at conscious cultural participation in forming Christian theology.”<sup>13</sup> In this type Japanese culture, norms and moors, tradition and anthropology engage with one another and actively participate in procuring a theology that is original, creative and Japanese. In this type Japan is not a mere observant but rather a serious and active participant; and at the same time the object of theological inquiry. This theological type attempts to bring forth the *wa* (harmony) which will appeal to the *Yamatogokoro* (Japanese Spirit). Further this theology of Japan will also open its doors to observe and engage with other theologies of the world.<sup>14</sup>

One can critically argue and evaluate each type and take any one of them and employ it in theological formation in Japan. Before employing any type, the following must be critically considered. 1. What are the starting point and expected goals of such a theological type? 2. Does it resonate with the life situation of the people? 3. What are the methods available for biblical hermeneutics? 4. Does the type engage with the history, culture, society and the current events of the country and the people? When a theological type answers these queries

<sup>9</sup> Hideo Ohki, “A Theology of Japan: Independence of the Intellect in Japan”, in *A theology of Japan: Origins and Task in the Age of Globalization*, (ed.) H. Ohki (et al.) Seigakuin University General Research Institute. Saitama. Japan. 2005. p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> H. Ohki, “A Theology of Japan: Independence of the Intellect in Japan”. P. 19.

<sup>11</sup> A. Fujiwara, “The Theology of Hideo Ohki and a ‘Theology of Japan’”. P. 31.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 31–32.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> H. Ohki, *Globalization and Theology of Japan*. P. 77.

satisfactorily it can be availed in theological education and exploration in Japan. The short overview of the different types points out that *theology of Japan* can be the suitable method and combined with Prophetic Dialogue, a concept that will be introduced and explored later. Further theology of Japan can serve as a potent tool for theological formation in Japan.

### Signs of Times

As already mentioned theology or theological formation must be concrete, relevant and resonate with life and historical events. Theology in Japan must read, understand and interpret the historical events that give momentum to theological formation. This is not a mere observation of the phenomena but an exercise that “asks the theological meaning of the phenomena-the meaning of Immanuel in the world, the meaning of God-is with-us in history.”<sup>15</sup> When we speak of signs of times, we speak of God-with-us in history. Without the understanding of God, who reveals himself and who works in history and through its events, it will be impossible to further an adequate theological formation in Japan. If God works in and through historical events which can be termed as signs of times then it is imperative to observe and understand these events. If so what are the signs of times?

### Towards a Japanese Theological Formation

Earlier in the paper the two aspects of theological formation in Japan was mentioned viz., the historical development of theological formation and the content of theological formation based on what theological type is employed. Here it will be made clear as we proceed how the desired aim can be achieved.

To cultivate, nurture, and foster the growth of indigenous theology of Japan and theological formation the following must be considered.

First, Freedom of Japanese theology: Ohki Hideo, who after returning to Japan from America in 1961 demanded the liberation of Japanese theology from “Germanic Captivity.” In an essay dedicated to his professor Reinhold Niebuhr, he wrote

“If one were to learn from Niebuhr, one would liberate the theology of Japan from futile “Germanic captivity.” One’s own theology will become independent, and will have the ability to face up to the realities of Japanese history rigorously. In particular, one will break the dead-lock of Barthianism in Japan, and will restore theology to a realism which is in close touch with the reality of the Church.”<sup>16</sup>

Further Yagi Seiichi echoes similar understanding. Although Yagi accepts the guardianship of Western theology for an infant Japanese theology he fears that it had fostered a rejection of

<sup>15</sup> C. S. Song., *Theology from the Womb of Asia*. SCM Press Ltd, London, 1988. p. 26.

<sup>16</sup> H. Ohki., “Kobun”, Nov. 1961, p. 5. Cited in *A History of Japanese Theology*., ed. Y. Furuya. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, Michigan, 1997. p. 6.

Japanese theology and writings. Thus Yagi laments that,

“we can never hope for a healthy growth of Japanese theology under such circumstances.... It is therefore with good reason that the cry has recently arisen among young theologians: “Deliver Japanese theology from Germanic captivity.”<sup>17</sup>

These two theologians are frustrated with “Japanese theologians’ passive acceptance of German theologies”<sup>18</sup> and with the failure of younger theologians to construct Japanese theology. Any venture in theological formation in Japan must first formulate a Japanese theology that mirrors the history, culture, society and life of the Japanese people.

Secondly the decolonization of Asian (Japanese) theologies: Asian theologies, including Japanese theology have been “invaded, disturbed and destroyed by theologies from the outside.”<sup>19</sup> Thus decolonization of theology demands as Rayan states, “rejection of theological imports or imitations; reappropriation of our theological soil and its possibilities; sowing of this soil with our own needs, hopes, and struggles” which would allow us to gather the fruit of our theological harvest and thus “foster human life and humanizing visions.”<sup>20</sup> This attempt to reconstruct an indigenous theology does not in any way reject the *inherent value* of other theologies but demands the independence and value of indigenous theologies.

Thirdly theological formation in Japan should develop its own hermeneutics. It is not a dismissal of Western Christian “theological reflection as of no consequence to the growing life of the churches in Asia” nor is a spirit of unwillingness to learn. Samartha argues that dependence on interpretations from outside Asia can become a hindrance, and at the same time it “reduces our credibility, diminishes our spirit, and distorts the universality of Jesus Christ to whom the scriptures bear witness.”<sup>21</sup> After 460 years of Christian presence, Japan should no longer depend on foreign interpretation. A quest for Japanese hermeneutics is a sign of growth, maturity and theological independence.

The search for Japanese hermeneutics must always ask the question what tools are to be employed. For without the right tools of hermeneutics, the search will be futile. Japanese theological formation must be innovative, imaginative and bold in finding and using such tools of interpretation. Japanese history, culture, literature, tradition both written and oral, anthropology and folklore are to be commissioned as tools of hermeneutics, to interpret Bible in our own cultural context. Of course Japan has still a lot to learn from the long Christian tradition in the West. Yet to concretize “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:

<sup>17</sup> Y. Seiichi., in *Japan Christian Quarterly*, Fall 1964m p. 259. As quoted in *A History of Japanese Theology*, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Atsuyoshi Fujiwara., “The Theology of Hideo Ohki and a “Theology of Japan” in *A Theology of Japan: Origins and Task in the Age of Globalization*, Ed. H. Ohki (et al.) Seigakuin University General Research Institute, 2005. p. 31.

<sup>19</sup> S. Rayan., “Decolonizing Theology”, in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*. V. Fabella and R. S. Sugirtharajah (eds.). Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N. Y. 2000. p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> Stanley J. Samartha., *The Asian Context: Sources and Trends*. In *Voices from the Margin*, R. S. Sugirtharajah (ed.) SPCK, London. 1991. p. 37.

14), we need to make Japanese history, cultural context as the foundation. To make Christianity as a Japanese religion it is absolutely necessary and indispensable to establish cultural environment as the foundation of theology.<sup>22</sup>

Fourthly, Japanese theological formation should be imaginative. A theological formation without imagination and creative signs and symbols in Asia and more so in Japan will be poor. What may be some of the images that can be borrowed from Japanese traditions? In light of what C. S. Song says, we can identify two concepts, namely *hibiki* from haiku and *images* that a poet uses, as images for theological formation.<sup>23</sup> Hibiki (echo) is the heart of haiku because haiku is “an echo of what is in the heart of nature.” Haiku brings out that which lies in the heart of human nature and the world of unseen. Haiku is a response to the “impacts of the world of seen and unseen. *Haiku* is the *hibiki* of life. It is an echo of history in the grip of destiny”.<sup>24</sup> Haiku hits the core of the subject it observes and in turn the inner world of the subject hits the poet. Theology and theological formation must strive towards similar effect. Theological formation must “hit the theological core of life- the innermost recesses of human heart where a person senses God and struggles with God and you get hibiki from that core to be transcribed into theology.”<sup>25</sup> If a theology does not touch the inner core of human being then it is a futile exercise and impotent in its application.

The second concept that C. S. Song offers is a comparison between poets and theologians. As a poet images his poems so too a theologian should “image” his theology especially in Asia as we live amidst “rich cultures to which the power of image had greatly contributed.”<sup>26</sup> Further Song rightly argues that theologians should “image” their theology rather than conceptualize it. For, Asian cultures are “shaped by the power of imaging, not by the capacity to conceptualize.”<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately theological formation in Asia has fallen prey to a culture of conceptualization and categorization that we have lost the capacity to be imaginative. God’s hibiki is waiting among the Asian realities to be found and to be given expression in our theological hiku. Theological education in Japan must train the minds and hearts of the trainee to discover the hibiki of God.

Fifthly theological formation in Japan should be de-institutionalized to explore new avenues. We have, for long in Japan, been clung to the Western concepts and theological institutions for direction. Institutionalization of thoughts, dogmas, doctrine leads to stagnation. Asian theologians and in our case Japanese theologians or those who are doing theology in Japan must venture into hitherto unknown territories of theological significance and must find new ways to theologize. We can no longer afford to sit in the shadows of someone’s thought be contend. A radical vision is called for to deinstitutionalize theology that has become unimaginative and uninspiring.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. 栗林輝夫, 「日本民話の神学」, 日本基督教団出版局, 東京 1997. P. 12

<sup>23</sup> C. S. Song., *Theology from the Womb of Asia*, SCM Press Ltd. London. 1998. pp54–64.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>25</sup> C. S. Song., *Theology from the Womb of Asia*. SCM Press Ltd. London. 1998. p. 54.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 61.



Further as pointed above theological institutionalization leads to theological stagnation which is evident if one were to look at the theological publications in Japan. Most of the research and writings in theology are *not related to theology of Japan but theological studies in Japan* or in other words *theology in Japan*.<sup>28</sup> These theological works too often bear little or no relevance to the people for whom one is supposedly theologizing. Again these research merely duplicate the works that have been done before and offer little in way of concrete productivity.

To circumvent these redundancies three points are to be kept in mind. One, why is one theologizing, for whom one is theologizing and who or what is one's object of theologizing?

First question that needs to be answered here is why one is theologizing? The central point of theologizing is to reveal to the people the self-revealing God who through Jesus Christ has revealed the salvific plan to humanity. When one perceives why the Word became flesh in Jesus Christ then theologizing is no more a mere intellectual exercise, rather it is "entering into the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ in the power of his resurrection, and entering in anguish and hope into the sufferings of the people"<sup>29</sup> and into their lives who cry out to Yahweh for salvation.

As pointed above when we know why we are theologizing it become rather clear for whom we are theologizing. As mentioned already we are theologizing for the people of Yahweh who cry out to him for salvation and here in our case Japan and its people become the focal point of theologizing. Though the cry of the people may not be as desperate, agonizing and helpless still they cry out to God for freedom, for salvation, for liberation. When one theologizes in and for Japan then Japan as country, its people, its culture, its society, politics and historical events in lives of the people and the nation all of these become the elements of theologizing. When all these are included in theologizing, it is not merely an indifferent and an unassociated academic concern. But rather it plunges right in to the center of activity, situates it self in the middle of peoples lives, in theirs hopes, struggles, anxiety; in their joys and sorrows. It is a theology that is passionate in its quest and potent in its application. To draw a map of theology of Japan, the whole of Japan must be considered as the object of theologizing.

Theological formation in Japan must reclaim "theologizing" as its basic enterprise. It must go back to the roots and ask the above mentioned fundamental questions and must answer them sincerely and radically. Theologizing in Japan calls for serious commitment, dedication and passion. Where main stream theology has failed or shied away theological formation should step in if it wants to maintain its credibility and relevance. To step back into reality, into the realm of theologizing and to perpetuate its spirit, theological formation has to enter into dialogue with reality, society religions and cultures, and people who are marginalized. A theological formation that can be credible and relevant must enter into a four fold dialogue-what we will term as *Prophetic Dialogue* and a four fold action plan-termed as *Holistic Action*

<sup>28</sup> Though the writer does de-value these researches and writings, the disproportionate level of output is alarming. Further they present too little if not any credible and practical application to the current theological debates and hermeneutics both in Japan and in Asia.

<sup>29</sup> Philip Potter., *Doing Theology in a Divided World*, in *Doing Theology in a Divided World*, V. Fabella & S. Torres (eds.) Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N. Y. 1985. p. 10.



*Plan*.<sup>30</sup> In the next part prophetic dialogue will be first defined and then shown how it can work together with the holistic action plan as the new paradigm for theological formation in Japan.

### Prophetic Dialogue as Paradigm for Theological Formation

Prophetic Dialogue can serve as the new paradigm for theological formation in Japan, but first a short note on the concept of dialogue is in order. A clear understanding of the concept in its religious sense will enhance the understanding and appreciation of prophetic dialogue.

Dialogue is not a new concept nor the four-fold dialogue that is being proposed is new; already in the New Testament we witness this dialogue.<sup>31</sup> Jesus enters in this four-fold dialogue with the Samaritan women at the well. She is a foreigner, belongs to different culture and is an outcast and above all has different religious beliefs. Yet Jesus neither imposes his beliefs nor he condemns; he neither judges her nor condones her; he neither agrees with her nor disagrees with her. He is just there to dialogue with a mutual partner. This exchange of Jesus with the Samaritan women should be our model of prophetic dialogue that must be inculcated.

Though the Jesus' model of four-fold dialogue is yet to be realized; the Catholic Church in its Vatican II documents and in the post-conciliar documents have repeatedly used and made dialogue a central concept. In the immediate post-conciliar time usage of dialogue was mostly limited to interreligious exchanges. In a wider sense of the term the council calls for a dialogue with the whole humanity with an attitude of "solidarity, respect and love" and at the same time invites for a "dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions." (NA 2) Further dialogue is also an "*attitude of openness and respect that permeates all the activity of the church in its relationship with all people...*"<sup>32</sup>

Further the document on Dialogue and Mission states that:

"Before all else, dialogue is a manner of acting, an attitude and a spirit which guides one's conduct. It implies concern, respect, and hospitality towards the other. It leaves room for the other person's identity, his modes of expression, and his values. Dialogue is thus the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission, as well as of every aspect of it, whether one speaks of simple presence and witness, service, or direct proclamation. Any sense of mission not permeated by such a dialogical spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teachings of the Gospel."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> The term *prophetic dialogue* was proposed and accepted by the Divine Word Missionaries 15<sup>th</sup> Chapter and the *four characteristic dimension* of the same congregation is renamed as the four-fold action plan. The present writer is indebted to the Society of the Divine Word for these two inspiring terminologies at the same time wishes to acknowledge that these two terms are developed a little differently than the original. The writer bears responsibility to any hermeneutical shortcoming that might arise.

<sup>31</sup> See Jn. 4: 1-26.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Robert Kisala., "Prophetic Dialogue as Life and Mission" in *Verbum*, vol 47, 2006, Steyler Verlag, Germany. p. 328. Italics added.

<sup>33</sup> "The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions", Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue document *Dialogue and Mission* (1984).

At Asian level the FABC in its first Plenary Assembly held in Taipei in 1974 declared:

“The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religious- in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own.”<sup>34</sup>

The Catholic Church both universally and locally (in Asia) values the importance of a dialogue that is mutual and open. The dialogue, as mentioned earlier, has been confined primarily to religious dialogue, here we take it a little further to experiment with other aspects that are interlinked with theology and praxis- of which we will see later. Again a word of caution in order: dialogue means not only openness to others’ views and beliefs but it also “indicates an honest, frank, even bold sharing of our own beliefs with others.”<sup>35</sup> The dialogue that is being proposed here goes beyond the religious sphere, it incorporates the whole of human experience.

‘Prophetic’ is another term that needs clarification. Prophetic as opposed to dialogue challenges, questions, at times warns and condemns. In its extremity it is neither open nor mutual. Dialogue may be linked with sharing one’s ideas with others without any clear commitment, and on the other hand, prophecy is linked with denunciation. Further juxtaposing prophetic and dialogue may seem self-contradictory and may even be a source of tension. Yet this tension eases one’s limited understanding of both concepts.<sup>36</sup> The concept of prophetic dialogue can be further clarified as follows:

The term “Prophetic Dialogue,” at first glance, can seem self-contradictory. There is clearly tension between the two elements. This tension, however, can help overcome a too-limited understanding of both prophecy and dialogue: we might think that dialogue is only a sharing of ideas with others with no clear commitment to our own faith; we might also associate prophecy only with denunciation. All parties to a sincere dialogue must honestly put forward their own views and concerns. In Jesus many recognized a prophetic figure who, like prophets of old, proclaimed God’s word. But what captures our attention is that he exercised his prophetic ministry in constant dialogue with those he encountered. Dialogue is rooted in mutuality and so is the prophetic aspect of it. We do not enter into dialogue arrogantly presenting ourselves as the only prophets. Instead, we give witness to our partners, they give witness to us, and the Spirit calls all of us to “acknowledge our own sinfulness and to engage in constant conversion... Together with our dialogue partners we hope to hear the voice of the Spirit of God calling us forward, and in this way our dialogue

<sup>34</sup> FABC Document., *For All the Peoples of Asia*, Manila: Claretian Publications, 1992, Vol. 1. pp. 11–25)

<sup>35</sup> Cf. R. Kisala., “Rophetic Dialogue as Life and mission”, in *Verbum*. P. 329.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Documents of the XVI General Chapter SVD 2006.*, In Dialogue with the Word, Nr. 6–September 2006. p. 21.

can be called prophetic...<sup>37</sup>

This long quote emphasizes that both partners in dialogue give witness to each other. At the same time dialogue is also a process and call to constant conversion to discern the voice of the Spirit. When we look at Jesus' ministry it is evident he was both prophetic in his proclamation of the good news and at the same time a partner in dialogue with those he encountered.<sup>38</sup> In prophetic dialogue one is neither an arrogant presenter nor a passive partner. Prophetic dialogue is a mutual understanding, cooperation, challenge and learning. Prophetic dialogue is a constant call to conversion and witness: conversion from one's cherished world views and witness to one's faith, commitment and beliefs. Hence partners in dialogue must be clear of the motive, process and goals.

The above discussed concepts naturally bring us to theological formation in Japan. Theological formation whether it is theological studies or search for original theology of Japan must always be undertaken with a spirit of prophetic dialogue. This prophetic dialogue being proposed is four-fold.

#### 1. Dialogue with people who have no faith community and with faith-seekers

One aspect of prophetic dialogue is to enter into a dialogue with people who have no faith community and with those that seek faith. As already noted, the Second Vatican Council calls all to enter into dialogue with other religions. Yet, in our world today there is also an increasing number of faith-seekers and people with no faith based community. More and more people turn to new religions, New Age movements and other organizations or institutions that promise to offer solace and religious experience. On the one hand since Second Vatican, in Japan, both Christians and people of other faiths have been engaged in mutual dialogue both academically and in practical level. Unfortunately the momentum that was seen till the mid 90s has slowed, and there is a mutual sense of futility because the dialogue has been inconclusive, non-binding and un-productive. On the other hand, there has been little or no initiative taken to dialogue with people of no faith community or faith seekers. Since in Japan there are more non-faith-seekers than faith-seekers, theological institutions must take concrete initiatives to inculcate an attitude of dialogue with both groups of people. Further, research is needed to find out what people are seeking and why? Again what motivates this group of people should be another question that should be asked. Identifying the motif and the situation will in turn lead to genuine dialogue. Of course the purpose of this dialogue must be mutual learning, openness, trust and enrichment without any ulterior motif. This kind of prophetic dialogue, with both, can bear fruit only if we can come out of 'holier than thou' attitude.

**Concrete steps to be considered:** Introducing in our theological formation topics and themes that are related to non-faith seekers movements and faith seekers movements; active research and sharing the findings; intellectual preparedness for dialogue if and when the time arises. These will greatly enrich and at the same time give meaning to dialogue that one may

<sup>37</sup> Documents of the XVI General Chapter SVD 2006., In Dialogue with the Word, Nr. 6. September 2006. p. 21.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

pursue.

## 2. Dialogue with people who are poor and marginalized

It has been already mentioned that poverty, marginalization and discrimination are major traits of Asia. Unlike other Asian nation Japan is neither poor nor her people marginalized; yet in her own way Japan bears the hallmarks of economic poverty, political marginalization and social discrimination. The first step towards dialogue with people who are poor and marginalized involves asking some basic questions. Why people are poor? What sort of poverty do they live in? Is it material, psychological or spiritual? How are they marginalized? Are they marginalized politically, socially, economically, culturally or racially? Further what sort of discrimination do they face? These are some questions that must be critically analyzed before entering in a dialogue. These are, as Pieris says, the *anawim* of Yahweh (quote...) who will stand with God during the last judgment. It is a moral duty of theology not only to enter into dialogue with them but join hands with them to work for their liberation and freedom that Jesus promised them.

**Concrete steps to be considered:** Theological formation should inspire and propel one to identify the problem. For example realization of homelessness in this county; dialogue with those who are homeless; dialogue with people with Hansen sickness; dialogue with foreigners who are marginalized or discriminated because of their country of origin or economic status; dialogue with the rural poor; field works that will enhance intellectual input; are some of the concrete steps that theological formation should seriously consider.

## 3. Dialogue with people of different cultures

Cultures, constantly grow, sustain and give meaning to people. At any given time people look up and look into their cultures for direction and evaluate their present way of living. As a life giving and sustaining organism cultures occupy important place. Dialogue with people of different cultures first of all invites one to go beyond one's cultural confinements, prejudices and value system. It is an invitation to enter into the other person's sacred space without judgment but with openness.

As it has been mentioned in the Asian realities, Asia is home to many different cultures and peoples. In 1853 Japan re-opened her doors to various peoples and cultures. Today's communication explosion has opened new and exciting avenues to interact with other cultures. This invitation to dialogue with other cultures remains a sensitive issue and at the same time an exciting possibility for mutual learning and enhancement.

Today more than ever foreign people are making Japan their home and the foreign communities are making impact on the Japanese society. A survey conducted by the government in 2006 estimates that the foreign residents in Japan had grown by 50 percent over the past ten years to 2.08million, accounting for 1.63 percent of the total population.<sup>39</sup> Further

<sup>39</sup> Registered foreigners in Japan by nationality: Korea 598,219; China 560,741; Brazil 312,979; Philippines 193,488; Peru 58,721; U. S. 51,321; Thailand 39,618; Vietnam 32,485; Indonesia 24,858; India 18,906, U. K. 17, 804; Others 175,804. Source: Immigration Bureau of Japan as cited in *The Japan Times*. 2008, January 3<sup>rd</sup>.

according to the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry in 2006 one in every 10 marriages in Tokyo's 23 wards was union between Japanese and a non-Japanese partner. This shows more and more people are coming to Japan and are going to stay in Japan.

**Concrete steps to be considered:** First a theological formation needs to be formulated which can to address issues such as mentioned above. Secondly there must be fostered intellectual maturity to approach other culture(s) as an unique and separate entity, without being judgmental. It is not an issue that concerns cultural anthropologists but an issue that has immense theological significance and which may change the map of theology in Japan. Theological curriculum must introduce cultural anthropology and theology of anthropology; all those who are involved in theological formation must be exposed to other cultures; theologians should work with cultural anthropologists to find solutions to theological problems that might arise out of cultural differences; as cultural issues are sensitive they must be approached cautiously and at the same time courageously to learn and to challenge.

#### 4. Dialogue with people of different religious traditions and secular ideologies

As already mentioned Asia is home to many religious traditions and secular ideologies which inspire and sustain its peoples. On the one hand it is home to Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, Christian and number of other religions; and on the other hand it is also home to secular ideology viz., communism. Here two difficult tasks are at hand. One is dialogue with other religions which are varied in theological outlook, cultural leaning, philosophical understanding and political stance. The other is dialogue with secular ideologies namely communism.

Dialogue with other religious traditions has been an enterprise that gained momentum after the Second Vatican Council. As a result various dialogue centers have been established all over Asia, though in Japan very little has been done in this regard. It must be acknowledged that various Christian affiliated universities and institutions have ventured out and have contributed intellectually by organizing seminars and symposiums yet in recent years there has been a sharp decline. The question to asked is why there has been a decline in is it because it has become outdated or one has lost interest in other religions. The main goal of any inter-religious dialogue is to move beyond one's own religious confinement and see how God is at work in other religions. For Christians and more so for Christian theology and theological formation it is a challenge and an invitation not only to follow the exhortation of Second Vatican Council but also follow Jesus in his prophetic dialogue.

Dialogue with secular ideologies is complicated and at times uncooperative. For example so far there is no known dialogue that has been done by any religion and communism. This task is formidable because of the oppressive and secretive nature of communism; and both religions and communism view each other suspiciously. How are we to dialogue with communism or for that matter any other secular ideology? The initial step will be to widen our understanding and knowledge of those secular ideologies; identifying ideologies, making contact with them, and treating them as equal partner in dialogue.

**Concrete steps to be considered:** First of all theological formation must realize that dialogue with other religions and secular ideologies is important and relevant issues must be considered carefully. Dialogue with other religions can not be left to a few 'specialists', rather it is a task of

the entire theological community. Courses on different religions, their philosophy and theology should be offered; practical live-in experience and exposure should be offered; interaction and exchange of theological ideas both at intellectual and practical level; inviting other religious scholars and specialist to teach and share with Christian theologians and those who are undergoing theological training; solving social ailments through mutual co-operation and understanding; working together for human liberation and human dignity. Dialogue between religions and secular ideologies present formidable challenges to prophetic dialogue. For, it involves mutual acceptance and openness. though both may hold different outlook, respect, openness and

#### The Four-fold Action Plan or The Holistic Action Plan

Theological formation and theology of Japan can not just remain as mere God-talk; as Pieris points out “God-talk is made relative to God-experience”<sup>40</sup> and the God-experience always and necessarily leads to action- praxis- which situates God at the center of reality. Thus the theological formation that we are envisaging also should have a concrete action plan. Here the following action plan is being proposed to enhance theological formation in its applicability.

The Holistic Action plan acts as a barometer to judge how we live and execute afore mentioned prophetic dialogue; yet over emphasis of only one will be detrimental to the spirit of prophetic dialogue. One last note before we consider the holistic action plan, the plans are not separate entity in their application nor are they appropriated exclusively to each of the prophetic dialogue; most of the times they may be inter-changeable and at times over-lap on one or the other.

### Biblical Apostolate

Biblical Apostolate comprises two elements; first it is a critical study, deep reflection and clear understanding of the Bible; second it is sharing with our dialogical partners- with people of other religions and ideologies- our faith and belief world born from our sacred scriptures. By sharing our belief world found in the bible we enter into the depths our dialogue partners’ hearts be they of other religions and of other ideologies. Further being open to their sacred scriptures, faith and belief world we open ourselves to God’s mysterious work in them. Thorough understanding and proper knowledge of one’s own scripture will be a prerequisite for such sharing. Again one must guard against being judgmental of one’s dialogue partner. Further the dialogue partners must remember with mutual respect and realization that the ground they are standing on is sacred and holy.

Here we could ask ourselves few questions. How deep is our knowledge of Bible? How much of biblical studies and literatures are introduced in our theological formation? Do we study seriously the scriptures of our dialogue partners? Are they part of our theological

<sup>40</sup> Aloysius Pieris., “The Asian Sense in Theology”, in *Living Theology in Asia*, J. C. England (ed). SCM Press Ltd. London. 1981. p. 174.

curriculum? Are we willing to share and open our faith world to the people of other faiths and ideologies? This action plan must be constantly evaluated from our own commitment to it, only then we will be able to come closer to our partners in dialogue.

### Mission Education, Research and Animation

This action plan may sound rather pedantic but in simple term what it means is proclamation of our faith and belief. We proclaim what we believe. It is not mere sharing of the story of Jesus, it is to proclaim:

“Jesus Christ is alive, and his message continues to challenge unjust secular and religious structures, to console and hearten those who grieve or struggle, to condemn evil in today’s complex globalized, religiously polarized and vindictive world.”<sup>41</sup>

Further as Bevans and Schroeder point out proclamation is also “an invitation to join the community of disciples, the church.”<sup>42</sup> Again this proclamation may also sound as proselytization. What we mean here is an open and honest proclamation, which does not impose or compel faith seekers or non-faith seekers to adhere to what one proclaims.

Through research we constantly search for the meaning of mission and how or what importance it has for individual as well as for the church. Further the goal of mission animation is not conversion of faith-seekers or people without any faith based community, but it is in sharing our conviction which might serve as a beacon for those who are either searching or not searching. It must be borne in mind that mission education, research and animation should be understood and interpreted in the light of the Second Vatican and the subsequent mission encyclicals and documents. Through mission education, research and animation we strive to understand our own faith and what propels us to adhere to this faith. At the same time we try to understand why there are others who have no faith or are still seeking faith. We try to make our faith a sign of hope and comfort.

Depending on one’s attitude, it can be argued whether Japan is a mission territory or not. In today’s world, every country is a mission territory for every where people are in search of the divine. Our theological formation should be able to face this reality- we can face this reality only when we are convinced of our mission in its entirety. Theological education should prepare both those who are in formation and formators to face this enormous challenge.

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<sup>41</sup> Stephen B. Bevans & Roger P. Schroeder., *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N. Y. 2004. p. 358.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 358.



## Justice and Peace and Integrity of Creation

Working for justice and peace and integrity of creation concretizes our dialogue with the poor, marginalized and discriminated of our society. Through this action plan we realize that events in our society do not happen in isolation but are inter-linked and are related. If they are relational then our solution or action plan also must be a total one. We can no more act in individual compartments. This action plan is not a social welfare project or a volunteer work.

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appears to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.<sup>43</sup>

Working for justice and for the *transformation* of the society is part and parcel of our preaching and mission. Working for justice and peace leads one to realize that *we reject human value system and adopt Kingdom values*. In our globalized world people and nature are weighed on a productivity scale and are treated as a consumer evaluates a product. Through this action plan we see human beings as God's image and the nature as God's creation.

We live in an oppressive, exploitative and consumeristic world. We live in a world that looks at people through colored glasses. We live in a profit making and selfish world. Theological formation has the moral responsibility to question and to point out any injustice and should consciously and concretely create a curriculum that incorporates topics on social justice and integrity of creation. Our attitude must be one of co-operation and co-creation.

## Communication

The purpose of social communication is for the "unity and advancement of men living in society" and peoples' lives are "profoundly affected by the means of communications."<sup>44</sup> The way we communicate has undergone rapid changes with the arrival of internet. Pope Benedict XVI has stated that "the new technologies are not only changing the way we communicate, but communication itself, so much so that it could be said that we are living through a period of vast cultural transformation. This means of spreading information and knowledge is giving birth to a new way of learning and thinking, with unprecedented opportunities for establishing

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<sup>43</sup> Synod of Bishops, "Justice in the World" (1971), "Introduction," in David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shanon, eds., *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*. Maryknoll, N. Y, Orbis Books. 1992. p. 289. As quoted in *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*. P. 369.

<sup>44</sup> A. Flannery (ed)., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar And Post Conciliar Documents*. Eerdmans Publishing Co, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1987, p. 293.

relationships and building fellowship”.<sup>45</sup> Thus communication is not mere exchange of opinions and ideas but we communicate more radically and deeply, sharing our faith and belief culture with others who have different faith and belief culture.

Theological formation in a new ‘computer culture’ should be a way of entering into dialogue with the world and its opinions.<sup>46</sup> If “God has spoken to humanity according to the culture proper to each age” and if “the church, which in the course of time has existed in varying circumstances, has utilized the resources of different cultures... in preaching” and “to spread and explain the message of Christ” (*Gaudium et Spes* No 58) then theological formation must value and utilize different means of communication.

The purpose of adapting to new developments in communication is “to employ these new instruments for a wider and more intense dialogue among all the diverse races and classes who share this ‘shrinking globe’”.<sup>47</sup> Thus when theological formation rises “to the challenge of new discoveries and technologies by bringing them to a moral vision rooted in our religious faith, in our respect for human person, and our commitment to transform the world in accordance with God’s plan” a true dialogue can take place with the world.

Any theological formation that ignores the development in communication is bound to be stagnant and irrelevant. God communicated with the world and humanity through his Word. If theology or theological formation wants to communicate that Word to the world and humanity it must then adapt itself to the changing ways of communication to be an effective ‘communicator’.

## Conclusion

The task of theological formation in 21<sup>st</sup> century and in a fast changing world is, to be modest, exciting and at the same time a challenging endeavor. We can not say absolutely what direction Japanese theological formation will move and what methods and means it will adopt and use but one thing is certain, a thorough evaluation of the existing method of theological formation and adaptation of new is in order. To say and acknowledge a drastic change is required, demands moral courage to accept our inadequacies, spiritual vision to see the future and political will to change our present theological formation if and when they are inadequate. Like Jesus who accepted the realities of his own time, theological formation must accept the Asian and Japanese realities and be able to respond to the signs of the times. A theology or theological formation that does not respond to the signs of the times and to the concrete realities of our time, to say the least, is impotent. Jesus’ gospel message still holds true because we still have the same problems Jesus faced. Theological formation in Japan must therefore search for new ways and means to make itself relevant to people and bring about

<sup>45</sup> Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the 45<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day: Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age. 2011, June 5.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. F. J. Eilers., *Church and Social Communication: Basic Documents*. Logos Publications, Inc. Manila, 1993, p. 280

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

change in the society.